
Evangelism Today

by J. C. McPheeters

It is the purpose of evangelism to permeate every phase of the church's program. The major task of the church is to make disciples and establish them in the Christian faith. This evangelistic objective, is to be achieved by the three-fold ministry, of teaching, preaching, and healing. Evangelism is the grand trunk line on which the whole program of the church is to advance.

The phases of the evangelistic program include preaching, teaching, revivals, visitation, music, the printed page, prayer, and insistence upon the cleansing and enduement with the Holy Spirit. Prejudice is often aroused against evangelism, due to an expressive emphasis upon some one phase of evangelism, to the exclusion of the other phases. A full orb'd program of evangelism, maintains a balance of emphasis upon all phases of evangelism.

The re-discovery of evangelistic preaching by Billy Graham, has proven to be one of the most significant events of our generation. This discovery is told by Billy Graham in *Christianity Today*, issue of October 15, 1956, as follows:

In 1949 I had been having a great many doubts concerning the Bible. I thought I saw apparent contradictions in the Scripture. Some things I could not reconcile with my restricted concept of God. When I stood up to preach, the authoritative notes so characteristic of all preachers of the past, was lacking. Like hundreds of other young seminary students, I was waging the intellectual battle of my life. The

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outcome could certainly affect my future ministry.

In August of that year I had been invited to Forest Home, a Presbyterian Conference center high in the mountains outside Los Angeles. I remember walking down a trail, tramping into the woods, and almost wrestling with God. I dueled with my doubts, and my soul seemed to be caught in the cross fire. Finally, in desperation, I surrendered my will to the living God revealed in the Scriptures. I knelt before the open Bible and said: "Lord, many things in this book I do not understand. But thou hast said, "The just shall live by faith." All I have received from thee, I have taken by faith. Here and now, by faith, I accept the Bible as thy word. I take it all. I take it without reservations. Where there are things I cannot understand, I will reserve judgment until I receive more light. If this pleases thee, give me authority as I proclaim thy word, and through that authority convict me of sin and turn sinners to the Saviour.

Within six weeks we started our Los Angeles crusade, which is now history. During that crusade I discovered the secret which changed my ministry. I stopped trying to prove that the Bible was true. I had settled in my own mind that it was, and this faith was conveyed to the audience. Over and over again I found myself saying 'The Bible says.' I felt as though I were merely a voice through which the Holy Spirit was speaking.

Authority created faith. Faith generated response, and hundreds of people were impelled to come to Christ. A crusade scheduled for three weeks lengthened into eight weeks, with hundreds of thousands of people in attendance. The people were not coming to hear great oratory, nor were the interests merely in my ideas. I found they were desperately hungry to hear what God had to say through His Holy Word.

Evangelistic Teaching

The teacher is mentioned along with the evangelist, in the various ministries indicated in Ephesians 4:11: "And he gave some apostles; some prophets; and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of a ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Evangelistic teaching must be Bible-

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centered, if the goal is to be attained of making disciples and establishing them in the Christian faith. One of the chief opportunities for evangelistic teaching, is in the local church school. Dwight L. Moody was won to Christ through a Sunday School teacher. The world scarcely knows the name of Edward Kimball, the Sunday School teacher, but the world will never forget the name of Moody. It was on the morning of April 21, 1855, that Mr. Kimball entered the Houghton Store in Boston, with a purpose of speaking to young Moody, who was a member of his Sunday School class, about surrendering his life to Christ. Young Moody was in the rear of the store wrapping up shoes. The young shoe clerk's heart was responsive to the gentle touch of Kimball's hand, and the winsome invitation to accept Christ as his Saviour.

In the future years, Moody witnessed perhaps a thousand times to the heavenly glow which was in his heart, on that spring morning, when he left the store and walked the streets of Boston. He writes: "I went out of doors and fell in love with the bright sun shining over the earth. I never loved the sun before. And when I heard the birds singing their sweet song on the Boston Common, I fell in love with the birds. I was in love with all creation." Similar experiences are being re-enacted today, thousands of times over, by faithful church school teachers, who have the evangelistic zeal and passion of Edward Kimball, who led young Moody to Christ.

Mass Revival Evangelism

The history of American Christianity presents a romance in mass evangelism, including the camp meeting, open air preaching, local church mass meetings, and city wide tabernacle meetings, the like of which is to be found in no other country in the world. Our pioneer heritage in mass evangelism springs from such celebrated names and associations as, Wesley preaching under the trees in Georgia; Robert Strawbridge on Sam's Creek in Maryland; Jonathan Edwards in the great awakening; George Whitefield preaching to twenty thousand people under the skies in Boston; President Timothy Dwight in the great revival at Yale University in 1802, (when over half the student body dedicated themselves to the Christian ministry), and Francis Asbury's ministry in the forest wilds, in camp meetings and mighty revival efforts, where multiplied thousands were converted and sanctified.

The dominant importance of mass evangelism in American

Christianity is well portrayed by James Stalker in his article on "Revivals of Religion" in Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics. He says:

America is the land of revivals. Nowhere else have these been so frequent as in the United States; nowhere else have the churches owed to them so much of their increase and prosperity; and nowhere else have they been subjected to such philosophical and theological discussion. It is to the atmosphere of revival in which they live and move that American thinkers owe the position of preeminence in religious psychology conceded to them even by the Germans; and it is not surprising that the American book which has attained most notability throughout the world since the beginning of the century, should be of this type, William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* (London, New York, 1902).

There was a sharp decline in mass evangelism, following World War I, which extended over a period of nearly three decades. During this period of decline America lost the great social and moral reform measure of national prohibition. There was also a marked decline in many of the major church programs, including the closing of a thousand churches per year for some twenty years, a marked decline in church school attendance for an approximate ten year period, and a blackout of Sunday evening and midweek prayer services across the nation.

Mass evangelism had a rebirth, following World War II. City-wide, county-wide, and area-wide denominational and inter-denominational evangelistic meetings have been held across the nation. The results of these campaigns have greatly strengthened the churches, and have been a large contributing factor in the new advance that is now being made in many of the major church programs, including an unprecedented church building program, organization of new churches, and large increases in church membership.

Evangelism in 1957

We are confronted in 1957 with evangelistic possibilities beyond anything hitherto confronted in the 20th century. Thinking men in

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many areas of life, have arrived at the solid conclusion, that a dynamic evangelism is the only remaining hope for the solution of the colossal problems which plague America and the nations of the world. Everything else has been tried and has proved a failure. A new evangelistic alertness has been created during the past two decades to the possibilities of evangelism. A new prayer movement is spreading across our land, which has in it the potential for the undergirding of a mighty revival that could sweep over the nation and around the world. Visitation evangelism and mass evangelism have been integrated in many areas of church effort, upon a basis which hold increased possibilities for both of these methods of evangelism. Crime, divorce, alcoholism, juvenile delinquency, and licentious living, stand at an all time high in the history of the nation. But great revivals in the past have come in times of great apostasy and profligate living. In the light of history and the promises of God, our apostate age need not stand as an iron curtain, making a great revival impossible. The surrender to such a fatalistic attitude, is utterly contrary to the revival possibilities set forth in the word of God. The world is confronted with the possibility of annihilating atomic warfare or a sweeping spiritual revival. However, in the face of such possible tragedy, we are also confronted with the possibility of the greatest days in the spiritual life of our nation, just ahead.

Church membership in the United States has hit an all time high of slightly more than one hundred million. More than sixty percent of our population belong to some religious body. But with all of our increase in church membership, there is a sad lack in purity and power in the church, for such a crucial time as the present. A new consciousness is dawning, in many areas, concerning the need of the baptism with the Holy Spirit in the modern church. When this lack of purity and enduement is met in the baptism with the Holy Spirit, America will again find herself in the midst of a mighty spiritual awakening.

A spearhead of evangelistic effort for 1957, which will command the attention of the whole of Christendom, will be the great Billy Graham New York crusade to begin in Madison Square Garden May 15th. This campaign, in outlay of effort, publicity, organization, and world-wide enlistment in prayer, represents what is perhaps the most colossal single evangelistic undertaking in the history of Christianity.

Important Months Ahead

A significant summary of the evangelistic possibilities in the months ahead, is given in the January issue of *Christian Life*:

Field studies reveal tremendous hunger on part of Christians for closer walk with the Lord, deeper work of the Holy Spirit . . . This shows up most clearly in great movement of prayer for revival. Evidences everywhere: local churches, interdenominational organizations, on mission field. Most surprising is marked trend among old-line denominations toward new evangelistic emphasis, deepened prayer life. Watch especially for sharper-than-ever step up in spiritual life of nation by early spring . . . Normal drop-off after Easter could easily be thwarted and clear revival underway by early summer.